

Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan (BSWI RMP)
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Information and Status Update
May 21, 2015

ACEC PROCESS SUMMARY

- 1) **IDENTIFY:** ALL ACECs, pre-existing or newly-nominated, must be identified for evaluation during the BLM's development and revision of RMPs. Can be identified externally - by the public or, internally - by the BLM.
 - 2) **EVALUATE:** ACECs must be evaluated using 3 criteria to determine eligibility for designation as an ACEC.
 1. **RELEVANCE:** An area meets the relevance criterion if it contains one or more of the following:
 - A significant historic, cultural, or scenic value (including but not limited to rare or sensitive archeological Resources and religious or cultural resources important to Native Americans).
 - A fish and wildlife resource (including but not limited to habitat for endangered, sensitive, or threatened species or habitat essential for maintaining species diversity).
 - A natural process or system (including but not limited to endangered, sensitive, or threatened plant species; rare, endemic, or relic plants or plant communities that are terrestrial, aquatic, or riparian; or rare geological features).
 - Natural hazards (including but not limited to areas of avalanche, dangerous flooding, landslides, unstable soils, seismic activity, or dangerous cliffs). A hazard caused by human action might meet the relevance criteria if it is determined through the resource management planning process to have become part of a natural process.
 2. **IMPORTANCE:** An area meets the importance criterion if it meets one or more of the following:
 - Has more than locally significant qualities that give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource.
 - Has qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change.
 - Has been recognized as warranting protection to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of FLPMA.
 - Has qualities that warrant highlighting to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare.
 - Poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

***** As of May, 2015 the BLM has completed the relevance and importance evaluations *****

 - 3. **SPECIAL MANGEMENT:** A management prescription is considered to be special if it is unique to the area involved and includes terms and conditions [not applied elsewhere in the planning area] specifically to protect the values occurring within that area. In other words, terms and conditions for permitted authorizations and activities such as seasonal use stipulations that would not be prescribed in the absence of the designation.
- 3) **DESIGNATE:** Special management prescriptions are specific to the values proposed for protection and may vary across alternatives or not. An ACEC may be designated based upon whether or not the values proposed for protection require special management attention in the selected plan alternative (i.e. proposed alternative).

Reasons to NOT DESIGNATE an ACEC include:

 - Other standard or routine management prescriptions (authorization terms and conditions) or other laws and regulatory authorities exist that are sufficient to protect the resource.
 - The area is already designated (e.g., Wild and Scenic River, National Historic Trail) or being proposed for designation under another authority that would provide the value proposed for protection enough protection and not require additional management attention.
 - The manager concludes that no special management is justified.

BSWI RMP ACEC PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. **PAST:** July 2013 – January 2014, Public Scoping Period; and May 2014 – August 2014, ACEC-specific Comment Period.
2. **CURRENT: PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVES CONCEPTS PERIOD **:**
 - Comment on ACEC Report on Relevance and Importance Criteria
 - Comment on Preliminary Alternative Concepts document, including comment on:
 - Action Concepts Common to All Alternatives;
 - Action Concepts found under the Alternative 1 column; and,
 - Action Concepts found under the Alternative 3 column.
3. **FUTURE:** Draft RMP/EIS Public Comment Period

ACEC CLARIFICATIONS

- ACECs are NOT “Conservation System Units” (CSUs) as described in ANILCA.
- ACECs are NOT withdrawals; however, an ACEC *may* have an associated withdrawal. Associated withdrawals over 5,000 acres require congressional approval.
- ACECs are administrative designations under FLPMA and do NOT preempt ANILCA provisions that apply to ANILCA CSUs (e.g. Wild and Scenic Rivers, designated Wilderness, National Historic Trails)
 - Most multiple use activities (other than those prohibited through the planning process) may occur within ACECs with the additional special management prescription for that area (i.e., permit terms and conditions).
 - The BLM must provide a balance of multiple use opportunities across all BLM lands.
 - Multiple Use represents a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for both renewable and non-renewable resources.
 - If an ACEC overlays an ANILCA CSU, applicable provisions of ANILCA still apply (e.g. Section 811 Subsistence Access, Section 1110, Special Access and Access to Inholdings, Title XI Transportation and Utility Systems).

BSWI RMP PLANNING AREA ACREAGE SUMMARY

ENTIRE BSWI PLANNING AREA	62,337,776 (total acres)	
BLM – Managed Acres	13,441,880	21.6% of entire plan area
ACECs: Existing and Nominated	5,966,180	44% (of BLM-managed acres)
ACECs: Relevant and Important	4,828,851	36% (of BLM-managed acres)

****NOTE:** The Preliminary Alternative Concepts Public Comment Period is currently not a required phase of the planning process; it is however, a proposed step in the “Planning 2.0” process now under development. The BLM feels that this stage of public involvement will improve development of future Draft RMPs.